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SUBJECT: GREECE/MACEDONIA: KARAMANLIS ADDRESSE TE NATION

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) In the wake of Greece's veto of a NATO invitation for Macedonia, Prime Minister Karamanlis and Foreign Minister Bakoyannis have made public statements that reiterate the Greek perspective on the name issue, stressing their desire for continuing talks under UN auspices to find a mutually acceptable solution. Karamanlis remarks to the Greek nation were carried live during primetime the evening of April 3.

¶2. (U) Meanwhile, all Greek opposition parties welcomed the veto, but most took the opportunity to criticize the government's overall handling of the Macedonia name issue, suggesting in particular that the government had not been sufficiently "firm" on the issue in the lead-up to the Bucharest NATO Summit. End Summary.

Karamanlis Addresses the Nation

¶3. (U) On the evening of April 3 during the regular primetime news hour, PM Karamanlis addressed the Greek nation from Bucharest. Salient points of his speech were:

-- The Veto: "I had said . . . that no solution means no invitation, and that is what I did." He added that Greece had "waged a tough struggle" on the issue, but had held firm in the face of opposition. Karamanlis said that withstanding fears by some that Greece would be isolated on this issue, "we found supporters." The Greek media have singled out French President Sarkozy as Greece's most "loyal supporter" in Bucharest, with at least one daily noting that Sarkozy had proven himself worthy of his "Macedonian roots." (Note: Thessaloniki Mayor Vassilis Papageorgopoulos announced that he has invited Sarkozy to receive the key to the city in recognition of his stance to defend Macedonia. End note.)

-- Next Steps: Greece is "in the middle of a difficult path," and "the issue does not end here, as we still have a way to go." Karamanlis appealed to the Macedonian leadership to "continue the discussion" in the UN-led process to negotiate a settlement of the name issue. He provided no tirece will continue ilfidence, with determin`."

-- Message to Maticized "the illusion Q can participate in the d the Macedonian people, saying that Greece's aim

is "not to humiliate our neighbors to but support them to stand on their feet," adding that Greece "aims at a solution that respects the sensitivities of all and strengthens regional stability." This is played up in the Greek media as "no winners or losers."

FM Bakoyannis Stresses Friendship with Macedonia

¶4. (U) In a separate press availability, Foreign Minister Bakoyannis said Greece is "satisfied" with the results of the NATO Summit, as Greece had "fully achieved its goals." Bakoyannis noted that there is no timeline for concluding negotiations, but expressed Greece's desire "for as speedy an end to the negotiations . . . as possible."

¶5. (U) She highlighted Greece's desire for good relations with Macedonia, stating "I wish to stress, for yet another time, that Greece has honest and friendly feelings for the people of FYROM. We wish that we become friends and partners. We wish to see them enter NATO." Bakoyannis said Greece pursues "a permanent solution and not just anything that would push the problem under the carpet." Finally, in an apparent response to previous remarks by Secretary Rice that the question of the name is one of antiquity, Bakoyannis retorted, "The name issue is a current political problem ... it is not an issue of antiquity ... It is a problem based on outdated logic which must cease to exist in the European reality we wish to build in our region."

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Opposition Welcomes Veto

¶6. (U) On the morning after in Athens, we can identify no voices opposing the Government's actions in Bucharest. Greece's major opposition parties all welcomed the veto, while criticizing the Government's handling of the issue. Leading opposition party PASOK's press spokesman Papakonstantinou said that "the Prime Minister achieved what is self-evident by moving along the red line that PASOK had drawn." Papakonstantinou downplayed the matter still further by adding that "Greece's aim was not achieved because the target was not the veto, but finding a solution to the name issue." Leftist coalition SYRIZA parliamentary party leader Alekos Alavanos made a similar point: "The time to celebrate will arrive when a solution arrives . . . (to an issue which) should have been solved years ago, and not pushed away from the UN and toward NATO and the U.S." Communist Party KKE Secretary General Aleka Papariga characterized the veto as "timid," and said the Government's actions should have been more robust as the veto had not been "clearly stated but rather implied." LAOS had reiterated its far-right stance the first night.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) The government's initial public handling of the veto and the opposition's reaction should be seen as domestic politics -- pure and simple. Karamalis' comments were designed to make the case to the public that he deserves credit for protecting Greece's position and that his strategy had paid dividends, notwithstanding the emotional debate about this issue prior to the Summit. Bakoyannis' comments we read both in terms of domestic politics and as an effort to keep the UN-led process alive; she more than anyone in the Greek political sphere will lose if no solution to the name issue is achieved. The oppositions' criticism of the government's handling of the issue is not surprising, and should be interpreted as an effort to capitalize politically on an issue on which a

large majority of Greek public opinion agrees, while seeking to discredit the government. End Comment.

SPECKHARD